



Annual Report of the
London Natural History Society

for the year ending
30th June 2004

Registered Charity 206228
© LNHS 2004

Secretary:

J. A. Edgington
19 Mecklenburgh Square
London WC1N 2AD

Treasurer:

M.J. West
52 Trinity Road
Ware
Herts SG12 7DD

Bankers:

National Westminster Bank plc
1 The Mall
Ealing
London W5 2PL

Independent Examiner:

J.L. Meyer
19/21 Bull Plain
Hertford
Herts SG14 1DX

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
REPORT OF THE COUNCIL TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PERIOD
1ST JULY 2003 – 30TH JUNE 2004

The title of Jan Hewlett's Presidential Address in December was "The changing face of nature conservation in London 1946 – 2003" in which she referred to the increased interest in wildlife and its conservation and to the growing number of organisations devoted to biodiversity. Mindful of these changes, Council acted on two fronts, consulting members on how they would like the Society to develop and also beginning the process of revising the Society's constitution.

The consultation began in February with Members' Day, an open meeting at Barn Elms Wetland Centre organised by the President. From the lively discussion, two key conclusions emerged: the Society's greatest asset is its tradition of voluntary recording, which complements the remit of larger organisations with paid staff; on the other hand it needs to attract more young people and those from London's ethnic minorities and to teach them identification skills. A brief report on these and other issues appeared in the *Newsletter*.

Greater cooperation with, for example, London Wildlife Trust (LWT), is both desirable and achievable, aided by the Society's participation in the London Biodiversity Partnership (with a seat on the Partnership's Project Board). A separate body, Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL) has been established as a local node of the National Biodiversity Network, initially under the auspices of LWT, to receive, collate and disseminate species and habitat records for the area. Council is considering how best to transfer the Society's huge stock of species records to the GIGL database whilst maintaining security of sensitive records and ensuring our members are properly credited for their efforts.

Since the last review of the Society's constitution 25 years ago there have been radical changes in London governance. This, and the higher profile accorded to nature conservation (such as requirements to assess the environmental impact of new developments) persuaded Council to consider revising the Society's Rules. A further impetus is the prospect of a new Charities Bill. Already, under existing legislation and guidelines for good governance, many charities have revised their structure, for example by moving to a smaller governing body. Various options are being considered by a Working Group of Council. Any changes will need the approval of the Charity Commissioners as well as the membership at an AGM. Comments and suggestions are welcome and should be addressed to the Secretary.

MEMBERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Total membership at 30th June 2004 was 997, hardly changed since last year despite the increase in subscription rates. Factors that contributed to stemming the decline of recent years include the Assistant Treasurer's robust and effective management of the membership database, and the new full-colour publicity leaflet. A good way to reach prospective members is via the mailing lists of like-minded organisations, and during the year the LNHS and the John Muir Trust carried out reciprocal mailings of leaflets. Members can help by asking to put our leaflet on display in their local libraries and community centres, and at relevant exhibitions and conferences. Supplies are available from the Librarian.

Under its new Editor, Graeme Lyall, the *Newsletter* had what in Fleet Street jargon would be called a re-launch. There was apprehension that the introduction of colour and a staple-bound magazine format would be too expensive but such are the economies of computer-based publication that Graeme has produced a very attractive product within the existing budget. For many members the *Newsletter* and the *Programme* booklet are their main links with the Society but the website, managed by David Corcoran, is fast catching up. Most Sections now have their own web pages, and ideas for development are welcome. For example, would a web-based index to articles in *The London Naturalist* and *The London Bird Report* be of interest?

On a sadder note, we must record the deaths of several members who have given valuable service to the Society, including Ben Aris, Captain Sir Thomas Barlow, Margaret Blackley, Miss Evelyn Brown, Enid Butler, John Crosland, E.H. Down, Laurence Green, Ralph Hale, Peter Lees, Graham Myers, Ken Osborne, Bill Park, Peter and Joan Williams. Evelyn Brown was our President in 1971 and 1972. Her main interests were the wildlife of Holland Park, and the conservation and recording of birds in London. These topics were the subjects of her Presidential Addresses which appeared in *The London Naturalist* **51** and **52**. Evelyn had been a member of the Society since 1950 and was made an Honorary Vice-President in 1972. Following her retirement she moved to Nottingham. Ralph Hale was our longest-standing member, having joined the Society in 1927. Early on he was chairman and secretary of the Ornithology Section but in 1947 he became the Society's Librarian, a post he held until 1956. In 1953 Ralph oversaw the removal of our library and collections from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in Keppel Street to new premises in Eccleston Square. He was made an Honorary Vice-President in 1976 and eventually retired to Leicestershire. Evelyn and Ralph were in their nineties when they died.

Obituaries of Ken Osborne and Bill Park will appear in *The London Naturalist*.

PUBLICATIONS AND JOURNALS

Council has been greatly concerned about late publication of the *London Bird Report*. Officers worked closely with the Editor, Andrew Self, and his team, to identify the reasons – a combination of obsolescent recording software, delayed returns from some Vice-County Recorders, and time needed for the new editorial team to “bed in”. All are being addressed but one has to ask whether the size and scope of the *LBR* has increased beyond the resources of a small volunteer society. No. 65, for 2000, was published to its usual high standard in mid-2004 while No. 66 should appear early in 2005. The aim of publishing within twelve months of the recording period remains but may not be easy to achieve.

There are fewer scheduling constraints on *The London Naturalist*, No. 82 of which appeared in December 2003. However, like the *LBR*, its size is restricted by the budget it can be allowed and the Editor, Keith Hyatt, sometimes has to hold over contributions to the next year. Since members receive both the *LN* and the *LBR* there may be a case for transferring all ornithology papers to the *LN* and reserving the *LBR* purely for the systematic lists and species accounts, within the same overall budget for journals. Members' views are welcome.

One of our members, Clare Coleman, is preparing a new edition of Francis Rose's *Wild Flower Key*, a classic field guide for aspiring botanists. Council granted the publishers, Penguin Books, permission to use some illustrations from Rodney Burton's *Flora of the*

London Area, of which the Society holds copyright. The opportunity to help develop identification skills was welcome, the agreed fee equally so.

Stocks of the *Flora* are now exhausted but Catherine Schmitt, Publications Sales officer, reports buoyant sales of other back issues, especially Colin Plant's *Butterflies of the London Area* and *Larger Moths of the London Area*.

RESEARCH STATIONS

The Bookham Common Survey began in 1941, making it one of Britain's longest-running records of changes to a natural habitat. For many years the Survey had no premises from which to operate. In 1964 the Society erected the first "Bookham Common Hut", replacing it with a second of similar size in 1989. As reported last year, damage to the roof, a need for more space, and a re-organisation by the National Trust of the Warden's outbuildings led to a decision to replace this hut with a larger one. The generous response of members to the appeal in memory of Ruth Day, and contributions in cash and kind from the National Trust, allowed a high-quality building to be purchased. The new hut was ready for use in the summer and by the time this Report appears will have been formally opened.

The Survey's Chairman, Ian Menzies, and the National Trust's local team have begun regular on-site meetings to discuss proposed work such as scrub clearance in light of the Society's detailed records of species sites. Also, Society members led by Alison Fure have recommenced the surveys of small mammals. A trapping survey has begun of dormice at sites across the Common, with permission from English Nature.

In contrast the Hampstead Heath Survey is not involved in management work on the Heath. This is amply taken care of by the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee with representatives from the numerous, and vocal, local organisations. The Heath Survey is well provided with brick-built accommodation but although attendance at monthly meetings is maintained there are currently rather few capable of identifying some of the more difficult taxa on the Heath.

SECTIONS

Field meetings of the Botany Section included three devoted to Local Change, a national scheme to survey selected tetrads and identify changes in their flora (and if possible the causes) since the last survey in 1987-8. It is good that the LNHS is involved in such exercises which can be carried out at least as well by volunteer societies as by contracted naturalists. The structuring of such surveys, however, may best be done nationally, as for example in ornithology where the oversight role of the BTO or WWT in such surveys led the Ornithology Section to disband its Research Committee.

The Botany Section appointed a new Fungus Recorder, Ted Tuddenham, while both the Ornithology and the Ecology and Entomology Sections have new Chairmen, David Darrel-Lambert and Colin Bowlt respectively. David Greeno is the new Treasurer of Ecology and Entomology. This Section's annual Brad Ashby Memorial Lecture was delivered as usual at a joint meeting with the British Entomological and Natural History Society. A joint meeting ensures a good audience and is a practice that might be more widely adopted. Sectional meetings are necessarily often specialised, for example where identification is the theme, but Council believes there is also demand for lectures and meetings on topics of general interest

to the Society's members and is consulting on how to achieve this within the Sectional structure.

Sections have again been active in publicising the Society and marketing its publications, for example at Lee Valley Bird Fair and at the Amateur Entomologists' Society exhibition. No doubt more could be done in this direction if volunteers can be found.

Fuller reports on the activities of the Research Stations and Sections are published in *The London Naturalist*.

LIBRARY

105 books were added to stock on the advice of the Library Committee, some of them acquired from dealers' catalogues and second-hand shops which are a good source of books relevant to London. The 40 or so members who hold library cards borrowed about 200 items during the year, and many others signed in as visitors to study reference material. Linda Hewitt, our Librarian, acknowledges several donations which enabled some gaps to be filled, especially in runs of journals. She is, as usual, most grateful to the staff at Imperial College for their help and support throughout the year.

The Librarian's office at the College also houses the Society's archives. A notable addition was a set of CDs containing sound recordings of the complete proceedings of the Society's Centenary Exhibition (1958) and Symposium (1976), as well as two episodes of the TV series *The Living World* (November 1996, on the wildlife of London, and July 1998, on Buckingham Palace Gardens). Only some older members will remember the voices of Messrs Bangerter, Castell, Teagle and others, while those of Jan Hewlett and David Bevan are familiar to most of us. We are indebted to Pat Sellar for transcribing these historic recordings from audio cassette to the more accessible medium of CD.

CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY

David Bevan, Conservation Officer, represents the Society on the Project Board of the London Biodiversity Partnership. LNHS is the lead organisation in the Action Plans for ecological monitoring in the generic area "Habitats and Species". Council's view is that the Society's Sections are well-placed to "trial" proposed schemes, especially in relation to species monitoring - the Action Plan for mistletoe, including surveys of associated species, being a good example.

Mention has been made of GIGL, London's new Records Centre. Its existence, and its remit to act as a local node of the National Biodiversity Network, invites the questions, what, and how, should the Society record? Should surveys note every species, no matter how common? Rodney Burton points out that earlier botanical recorders virtually ignored shepherd's needle, then a common weed. Now that it is almost gone, there are few reliable records of where it once was. And what database should replace the card index? As with most new technologies, competition will ensure that only some of those on offer - Recorder, Cobra, Mapmate, etc. - survive. But which one? Our Society, with its limited resources and volunteer effort, has to take these questions seriously. Council intends to cooperate with GIGL and its sponsor, the London Wildlife Trust, in seeking grant funding for projects to address these questions.

In conclusion, members are reminded that those named in this Report are only a small fraction of the many who in various ways help the LNHS achieve its charitable objectives. Our

Council, Sections and Committees could not function without their support, for which we thank them. This is your Society, and offers of assistance are always greatly appreciated.